

*Middle East Peace Process*

Q. Mr. President, what about the Middle East peace process? Is it going to take—Hanukkah celebrates—it's a celebration of miracles; what is it going to take to rekindle the Middle East peace process?

*The President.* Well, I'm actually quite hopeful. I think, first it takes a reaffirmation to the process of peace, which means that there should be a high level of security associated with the process itself. And I think there's general belief that the Palestinian Authority has redoubled its efforts on security. The Israeli Cabinet has seemed to adopt the position that said that they would be for another withdrawal consistent with the Oslo accords. There appears to be other discussion in Israel over the questions, the long-delayed questions about the airport and the port and the safe transit from the West Bank to Gaza.

So I'm actually quite hopeful that in the coming year we'll have progress not only between the Israelis and Palestinians but also between Israel and Syria. I think the openness is there, and I think that many people are sobered by the consequences of the absence of a viable peace process. So maybe it's just the holiday season, but I'm feeling pretty upbeat about it.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:25 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Mayrim Baram, an Israeli who lost a son in the 1973 Yom Kippur War, his surviving son, Amatzia Baram, and his daughter-in-law, Bonnie Baram Belkin; Susan Koss, director, and Danny Lew, student, Jewish Primary Day School of the Adas Israel Synagogue; and U.S. District Judge Royce C. Lamberth.

Statement on the Death of Sebastian Arcos Bergnes  
*December 23, 1997*

Hillary and I were saddened to learn of the death of Sebastian Arcos Bergnes, a courageous and tireless activist for human rights, democracy, and freedom in Cuba.

Mr. Arcos dedicated his life to peaceful change in his beloved homeland. He was a man of honor and dignity who commanded enormous respect around the world for the sacrifices he made and the good work he did for the people

of Cuba. As one of the founders of the human rights movement in Cuba, he blazed a trail which has inspired many others who cherish individual liberties. He was an example to us all and will be missed.

Our thoughts and prayers are with his son and daughter and the rest of the family who will carry on the effort to secure human rights in Cuba.

Statement on the Oklahoma City Bombing Trials  
*December 23, 1997*

Two years ago, I told the families of the 168 innocent men, women, and children who perished in the Murrah Federal Building that they had lost too much, but they had not lost America, and that we would stand by them for as long as it took.

The dedicated team of prosecutors and investigators who brought these cases to a successful conclusion have helped to fulfill that promise. The Nation is deeply in their debt.

I know that no verdict in a court of law can ease the loss of a loved one. But the successful prosecution of Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols should offer a measure of comfort that all Americans stand with the families of Oklahoma City.